

## The Mech 5601

Chapter 5601 It's That Time Again

The worth of a single product could sway an entire company.

That was the power of a good mech design. Ves inwardly grinned as he saw that his gambit had made a lot of progress.

It was not without reason why Ves and Master Decimus Horst had taken their time to design the Supremo Project.

The mech design went through multiple ups and downs as the abrupt transition from the Age of Mechs to the Age of Dawn forced both mech designers to reimagine their original mech concept.

After a lot of hard work, they finally managed to design an excellent second-class heavy artillery mech that was largely made out of Davutan technology and materials.

It was expressly developed to serve the offensive and defensive needs of the Colonial Federation of Davute, but it could easily be just as useful for any other second-rate state!

The Davutan adaptations clearly did not bother the CEO of Isthmus Manufacturing that much. At worst, their own in-house design teams could easily swap the Davutan components for alternatives that were much easier to deal with in the Rubarthan Pact.

To be honest, the overarching reason why Micky Tarukan valued the Supremo Project so highly was because the Destroyer of Worlds was actually involved in the design process!

Even if her involvement was only minimal, that was already enough to make a lot of Rubarthans crazy with desire!

If there was actual concrete proof that she improved the Supremo Project somehow, then that would likely turn it into one of the most popular second-class heavy artillery mechs in the Rubarthan Pact!

No.

That should hardly be the limit for this mech model.

The Supremo Project would likely catch on in the Red Ocean Union as well! After all, how many mech designs could boast of having the capacity to channel a minute fraction of a god pilot's awesome power?

As long as the performance of the Supremo Project was high enough to back up everyone's expectation, it was bound to capture a large share of the market for heavy artillery mechs!

The only market where the Supremo Project would fail to gain traction was in the Terran Alliance.

There was no way the Terrans would permit the widespread use and proliferation of a mech that was empowered by a Rubarthan god pilot.

It didn't matter if the Terrans themselves did not make use of the Supremo Project. They probably wouldn't be able to stand it if their vessels would rather resort to a 'Rubarthan' mech as opposed to one of the many second-class mechs designed by Terran or Terran-aligned parties!

Tarukan held no expectations towards the Terran Alliance's mech market. Both the Terrans and the Rubarthans had pretty much kept their mechs within their own spheres of influence.

As Tarukan finalized his expansive analysis of the Supremo Project based on the limited amount of information supplied by Ves, he made note of one more important factor.

If Ves could design one mech that slightly borrowed the power of the Destroyer of Worlds, he should easily be able to do so again.

There were all sorts of useful mech types that could gain a lot of wind in their sails if they could harness even the slightest amount of power of an actual god pilot!

The help bestowed by the Destroyer of Worlds was especially easy to work with because she could make every attack hit harder. The destruction properties of her god kingdom were well-known to the Rubarthans. As long as she could amplify the firepower of every ranged mech, then that would grant a mech company like Isthmus Manufacturing a huge amount of irreplaceable cash cows!

The insane potential for subsequent business opportunities made it even more important for Isthmus to secure Ves' cooperation.

Micky Tarukan completely forgot about his initial reaction after the Senior Mech Designer made an excessively greedy demand.

Compared to the value of his mech designs, his demands became a lot more reasonable!

"The terms and scope of this potential agreement has vastly exceeded my expectations." The CEO hastily told Ves. "We must deliberate on your counter-offer. The Supremo Project is a particularly compelling mech design. It should do well in Rubarthan space. It is a waste to turn it into an exclusive product for a single ordinary second-rate colonial state."

That told Ves that Micky Tarukan would definitely go back and report to the board of directors.

No. That was too slow. A decision as big as this could only be made by the ultimate controller and decision-maker of Isthmus Manufacturing.

Ves needed to wait until this bigshot issued a response before they could talk more substantively about cooperation.

"Very well. Please do not take too long. I originally intended to hand the Supremo Project over to the Colonial Federation of Davute. If you do not issue a response quickly enough, then unforeseen complications may arise."

"Please give us a week. That should be long enough to explore the possibilities of partnering up with each other."

"You have three days. I am not sticking around in Bortele III much longer. I intend to wrap up all of the major business decisions that require my intervention while I am here. After that, I will turn my attention back to my design projects."

"Understood. We shall return quickly now that I have raised the priority on this matter."

The chief executive did not linger much longer. Time was of the essence as a lot of stakeholders needed to be informed.

The expansive projection of the reception hall disappeared as the communication channel shut down on the other end.

"Good job, boss!" Gavin cheered as he approached from the side. "We were initially scared when you veered from the script, but you applied the right kind of pressure. Asking for 20 percent ownership in a company as massive as Isthmus Manufacturing may still be excessive, but the number shouldn't be large enough to shut down the negotiations outright. We should already be happy if we can obtain 15 percent, especially if you can continue to design mechs such as the Supremo Project. It is just like with the Hex Federation but on a much larger scale. You can conquer an entire population as long as you design the right mechs."

The comparison sounded inappropriate at first, but Ves quickly realized that their situations were quite similar.

The Superior Mother was one of the deities that the Hexers already worshiped and revered. The chance of experiencing her power and gaining the opportunity to come into contact with her was high.

A lot of Hexers flocked to mechs such as the Valkyrie Redeemer precisely because they thought the mech could bring them closer to their Supreme!

The Destroyer of Worlds might not be a classical god, but she may as well be one given how much the Rubarthans adored her like one! Even non-Rubarthans looked up to her due to her awesome firepower and her ability to shatter entire planets.

Gavin did not exaggerate when he made that remark.

Ves raised his hand and placed it on his assistant's shoulder. "Please pay attention to this matter. I am counting on you to explore the ramification of this possible deal and how our relationship with the Rubarthan Pact and other major groups will change as a result."

"You are right to be concerned." Gavin grew a little more serious. "From the moment we start to establish roots within the Rubarthan Pact, we will enter a colonial alliance that is beset by a leadership crisis. Many princes are openly or covertly jockeying for power. The temptation to become the Red Ocean's version of the Star Emperor is simply too great for them to resist. Once we wade into this mud pool, we are bound to get dirty."

Ves casually shrugged when he heard that. "We can handle it. With the Destroyer of Worlds backing me up, the princes won't dare to cross the line. Besides, it is not as if I have any actual horse in this silly race."

"Oh? Shouldn't we be favoring the Inferno Spear Prince. He is close to the Destroyer of Worlds. Once he is able to ascend the new throne, it will become much easier for us to lobby him. We can build a real base of power in Rubarthan space."

Ves shook his head. "It is not my intention to allow us to get assimilated by the Rubarthans. We need to maintain a certain degree of detachment in order to maintain our independence and neutrality. Cozying up too much to the Rubarthans will just cause us to get alienated from the Terrans. We should keep everything strictly business. Owning stock in a large mech company and designing a few exclusive mechs for them still falls within the business scope of a mech designer. Besides, the Destroyer of Worlds actually doesn't care about the Inferno Spear Prince all that much."

"Huh?"

"It's complicated. I have already said too much. Anyway, please follow up on this issue. I think it won't take long for the Impresario Prince to make up his mind and contact me directly."

Gavin nodded in agreement. "That is a likely possibility. If the 5733rd prince truly takes the initiative to contact you in a hurry, then we have already won this bet. There is no way a bigshot like him wants to talk to you more directly just to refuse your counteroffer."

Ves really looked forward to seeing that happen. The repercussions of forging a successful deal would be great, but he was confident that he could deal with them. This was a time where the Larkinson Clan must continue to sustain its rapid expansion in order to keep up with his rapidly growing demands.

"Meooooow...!"

Both Ves and Gavin interrupted their conversation and glanced at the gem cat that was moaning and squirming on the desk.

The injured but healing cat had come under increasing strain all of a sudden.

"What is wrong with your cat?"

"I think... it is finally time for him to use the kitty litter box once more!"

It was gem time again!

Ves had been waiting for so long to get his hands on the next batch of gems!

"Meeow... meooooow... meeeeeooooow...!"

Given recent events, Lucky's upcoming batch of gems were bound to possess particularly exotic and remarkable properties this time!

"You can go now." Ves hastily dismissed his assistant. "Lucky needs a bit of personal attention. Make sure to block any appointments in the next hours, including the urgent ones!"

"Meeeeeeeeooooow..."

Lucky appeared to be in even more pain as his archemetal body had yet to heal from the damage inflicted by Master Quan.

Hopefully, his self-evolving cat managed to make the right adaptations that enabled him to cope a lot better against this kind of attack next time.

Ves didn't care too much about this, though. The only topic that remained on his mind was GEMS!

"C'mon, buddy. Your digestion system has hold onto the gems long enough. Let it all out. I hope that you have been saving up for something this time."

Ves may have reduced his reliance on gems as of late, but that was not that big of a deal.

If it was no longer cost-effective to apply the valuable gems to individual mechs, then he would just find another use for them! He just needed to figure out a way to safely extract and make use of what they contained inside their crystalline structures.

As the minutes passed by, Lucky's metallic body convulsed increasingly more.

At a certain point, the cat had finally reached his limit!

"MEEEEEOOW!"

Three large and brightly glowing gems ejected from the exit port and slammed against the wall like bullets!

Ves immediately ditched his cat and ran off to pick up the hot and steaming gems that had fallen on the office room floor.

"Just three? They better be good."

He already had a feeling that he had obtained a big prize this time.

Chapter 5602 Heavenly Gems

"Meeoow... meooooowww..."

Lucky looked like he had been utterly drained. The damaged gem cat hadn't been in good shape to begin with, but his latest effort impacted him to such an extent that he soon gave in to exhaustion.

Ves on the other hand became more energized than ever!

All of the excitement that happened in the past did not wear him down in the slightest.

Though he managed to accumulate quite a sum of remarkable gems, it was always useful to have more. This was especially the case when he had grown powerful enough to exploit Lucky's gems in more varied ways than embedding them into a mech.

Now that the Larkinson Army had grown into a large and powerful second-class mech force, Ves no longer became so dependent on the power boosts of his gems.

He also discovered that the boosts provided by his gems were comparable to the domains formed by ace pilots and other domain shapers. This meant that there was a high likelihood that he would just waste these precious treasures if he embedded them into an existing ace mech.

The best destination for these gems were newly fabricated mechs dedicated to expert pilots or champions who had yet to find their way.

As long as the properties of the gems matched their inclinations, the young but talented mech pilots not only gained a crucial boost of power, but could also comprehend the principles of the effects bestowed by the gems.

Once these mech pilots successfully advanced to the rank of ace pilot, their domains would perfectly synchronize with the inherent properties of their gem-boosted mechs, thereby allowing them to gain a huge head-start in integrating them further!

"If my suspicions are correct, a deeper synchronization of domains might actually help these pilots complete the second phase of the Mech Body Merger Process one day!

Of course, that was so far away in the future that there was little point in thinking about it now. A lot of accidents and complications could happen in between. The Red War became more intense every day, so the battles in the years ahead were bound to cause more serious casualties.

Not even Ves could guarantee that the Larkinson Clan's current batch of high-ranking mech pilots would successfully reach their ultimate bottlenecks!

This was why it became more important than ever for the clan to continually produce new expert pilots.

The greater the quantity of high-ranking mech pilots, the higher the chance that a handful of them would successfully overcome all odds and reach the third major cultivation rank!

Ves snorted. "I'm thinking like a mecher now. Everything has become a game of numbers nowadays."

He did not really like this mindset. It encouraged him to think of his subordinates as cannon fodder rather than members of his own family.

Alas, this was how the game was played. Ves did not possess the power to flip the table and impose a new order. He could only adapt to the current reality and hope to grow strong enough to have a real voice one day.

Ves finally turned his attention to his precious gems. He placed them on his desk and spaced them out so that they stood out more.

Before he examined them in detail, he could already tell that this new batch of gems were undeniably different from the previous ones.

The gems that Lucky excreted in the past were akin to solid crystals. They were so solid and closed that nothing could go in or out. Ves now deduced that this was primarily done to prevent whatever was inside from spilling out until they became completely drained.

That made the current batch of gems more remarkable. As Blinky cautiously examined the spiritual activity around the gems, he discovered that the exterior of every gem had actually become semi-permeable.

It was as if every gem had become surrounded by dozens of tiny one-way ports that allowed spiritual energy to seep into the center of the gem without allowing any of it to spill out again!

Though the change in the design clearly made the gems a little bit more fragile, the ability to absorb E energy radiation had massive implications!

"These gems are a lot different." Ves noted with increasing amazement. "Perhaps... they can even grow over time."

At the very least, Ves suspected that these gems possessed the inherent ability to interact with the power of heaven!

"It turns out that Lucky is not only able to evolve his body, but he can also evolve his output."

This was such a significant improvement that the three new gems already deserved their own classification, as they may possess even greater properties that Ves had yet to discover!

"I'll call you heavenly gems."

Ves had encountered a number of odd gems. The unstable chaos essences and the more recent batch of archmetal gems all aroused his curiosity.

However, this was the first time that he encountered gems that had fully adapted to a medium-energy environment!

"Let's see what you can do." Ves began to grin as he cautiously picked up the flashiest gem.

It had attracted his attention from the very beginning. It was a large heart-shaped gem that possessed an internal glow that intermittently cycled between green, red, yellow, silver and blue.

His blood pumped harder in his true body as he already had a very good guess of what this heavenly gem contained.

[Heart of the Five Brothers]

The yearning of life from five innocent souls is encapsulated in this gem. Grants an inherent authority that greatly increases speed and efficiency of transforming the power of wood, fire, earth, metal and water into other phases.

ii ti ...

Ves fell silent as a lot of old wounds opened up all of a sudden. The heavy failure that took place on New Constantinople VIII occupied the center of his attention once again!

With the knowledge that he possessed today, he felt incredibly shamed by how stupid and ignorant he was back then.

Inspiration had driven him to bring the Elemental lord to life, but his overambitious work suffered from its creator's lack of understanding.

The Elemental Lord had already been condemned to death from the moment he conceived of this ambitious idea!

Ves vowed to never repeat such a painful blunder again. Even if he entered into a powerful inspired state in the future, he needed to remind himself of this agonizing failure in order to rein in his unbridled creativity.

He previously thought that he had paid an extremely heavy price for his avoidable failure. The guilt of killing his own 'child' weighed so heavily on him that he had entered into a slump that only disappeared once he went on vacation.

This was why he suddenly felt delighted to see that at least a modest remnant of the five brothers had managed to survive the calamity that disintegrated the Elemental Lord!

"It appears that even lighting tribulations can be fooled."

Nothing was absolute. Everything had exploits.

Lucky was somehow able to smuggle out a piece of the Elemental Lord before the extraordinary five element mechs collapsed into ash without catching the attention of a ruthless heavenly authority.

Ves really wanted to cut open his gem cat and see how Lucky actually worked!

"Ahem."

He carefully put the precious heavenly gem into his pouch. He had no ideas about using the gem in any of his products for the time being.

Now that he had a chance, however small, to redo the creation of the Elemental Lord, he needed to do the utmost to raise the chance of success as high as possible.

If he wanted to bring the mech that he had envisioned into a proper form of existence, he needed to make extensive preparations!

Ves had learned his lesson.

He promised to himself that he would not think about giving the Elemental Lord a second chance at life until he thoroughly mastered the five classical elements.

He also needed to work on his fundamentals and improve mech design capabilities well enough for his work to withstand a multi-modal 81 strikes lightning tribulation.

"Let's see what else I have gained."

He picked up the second heavenly gem and actually felt as if he was holding a miniature power reactor. There was so much electric potential inside this gem that it could produce a remarkably powerful explosion if he converted it into a bomb!

[Electric Roar]

The final roar of a great beast is locked inside this gem. Increases the electrical damage output of a mech by up to 200 percent.

Ves started to frown.

He did not think the heavenly gem was weak. A 200 percent boost was massive.

The issue he had with the gem was that its amplification was extremely specific. Ves had encountered gems like that before. There appeared to be an inherent tradeoff between potency and applicability.

The Electric Roar gem clearly leaned much more towards the former than the latter.

If his guess was correct, then the gem was unable to increase the output of the power reactor of a mech.

That would have been extraordinarily useful for a high-end first-class multipurpose mech!

Those powerful machines depended so much on power output that its cost even started to rival the cost of their armor systems!

If a single gem was able to make it so that they could channel three times as much energy than before, then that could boost the power of any energy weapon platform to a ridiculous extent!

Alas, the heavenly gem's effect restricted itself to amplifying the power of direct electrical attacks.

"This should be an incredibly suitable gem for one of Ketis' new Storm Sword mechs." Ves concluded.

Ketis actually had more experience with electrical weapons. Stormblade technology continued to be useful as it was one of the many technical applications that received a substantial boost in the Age of Dawn.

The rise of hyper technology enabled stormblade weapons to become even more powerful than before. Their ability to destabilize and overload energy shields had become even more crucial now that melee mechs experienced a revival in the Hyper Generation!

A rising expert pilot that broke through while piloting the Stormblade Samurai or the Storm Sword would definitely have the potential to become a veritable storm lord once his expert mech became embedded with the Electric Roar!

"This should be a nice birthday gift for my former student." Ves ultimately smiled in satisfaction before stowing the prickly gem away.

"Now, onto the last one."

This gem looked more ominous than the other two. It was pitch black but its center sparked with occasional flashes of white light.

[Final Sacrifice]

The sacrificial intent of a true ideologue is contained within this gem. When fully charged, it allows a mech to generate a large weapon construct that can fire a single full-powered energy attack that can bypass all energy barriers and disintegrate all matter.

This was yet another heavenly gem that clearly shared a relation of the previous assassination attempt.

Though Ves loathed Master Xieliq Quan for betraying his trust as well as his own race, the old man at least provided compensation in the form of giving Lucky the 'ingredients' he needed to produce these powerful gems!

Ves briefly questioned how Lucky was able to produce a heavenly gem like this only a day after near-traumatic event, but he quickly set this puzzle aside in favor of determining the power of the Final Sacrifice gem.

"The description is too vague." He scowled.

The effect of this heavenly gem was completely novel. Ves had never encountered a gem that could allow a mech to manifest a powerful weapon out of energy and use it to launch an incredibly exotic attack.

It certainly saved Ves the trouble of obtaining and mastering molecular disintegration technology, but that might not necessarily be a good development.

"If I want to bestow a mech with the power to disintegrate elements, then I need to do a proper job instead of resorting to a shortcut."

Still, there were many possible uses for this highly promising heavenly gem. The idea he came up with was to embed it onto a melee mech.

If the heavenly gem was accurately able to recreate the astounding sacrificial attack of the Dustweaver, then the damage potential was insane, especially against shielded targets!

Chapter 5603 Another Fruitful Exchange

Ves had many reasons to be happy as of late.

The surprise gift of heavenly gems did much to improve his mood. Together with all of his other gains thus far, he had made a lot of gains during his work visit to Bortele III.

He was not even done yet with this planet!

He still awaited a response from the Rubarthans about a big investment deal, and Alexa was almost done with recruiting a new batch of ambitious second-class Journeyman Mech Designers.

With only a couple of days to go before he intended to return to the New Constantinople System, Ves tried to make the best of his situation by meeting with all kinds of people.

None of the deals he struck came close to the scale and significance of becoming a partial owner to a massive Rubarthan mech manufacturer, but they still represented progress in their own ways.

Ves knew better than to put all of his eggs in a single basket.

Capturing a heavy chunk of Isthmus Manufacturing would definitely enrich him and his clan to a huge extent, but losing it for whatever reason would deal a serious blow to the Larkinsons!

Ves could not allow his clan to become overly dependent on just a single source of income and production.

The Living Mech Corporation still needed to do the difficult and tedious work of establishing new partnerships with material suppliers and setting up more manufacturing complexes so that his mech company could still stand on its own feet if necessary.

More importantly, all of the wealth granted by earning dividends from so much stock could easily dominate his clan and his life to the point where they went astray and lost their original values!

Aside from meeting with the representatives of various upstream companies to ensure that the Larkinson Clan gained more access to scarce and precious raw materials, he also met with a number of Master Mech Designers.

Ves was always on the lookout to conduct productive exchanges. Every high-ranking mech designer accumulated a lot of special knowledge and ingenious tricks that could not easily be found in textbooks.

One of the most notable discussions he held during this time was with one of his prior challengers.

Master Ginevra Hubert-Colmain happened to be the only challenger out of the four who beat his Fey Fianna in a challenge match.

Her Montebra GHCMQ.-3 was a second-class hyper lancer mech that clearly leveraged the power of hyper technology to gain access to a dramatic new feature related to electromagnetism!

When Ves obtained the Electric Roar heavenly gem a short time ago, he initially thought about pairing it up with one of Ketis' Storm Swords.

The quasi-first-class transphasic hyper swordsman mech made use of an upgraded version of stormblade technology that promised to exert a massive degree of pressure against any shielded targets!

In fact, the Storm Sword model had the potential to turn into a nemesis for any enemy unit that heavily relied on energy shields and electronics in order to function!

An expert mech version of such a powerful machine would fare much better in the battlefields of today than many other high-ranking mechs!

Yet... when Ves recalled how the two Montebros were able to lock onto two opponents from a fair distance and successfully close in on them by relying on magnetic attraction, he felt it might be even better to apply his new gem to such a machine.

Ginevra's attainments in both conventional and exotic energy types were so great that she could undoubtedly make much better use of the Electrical Roar gem than Ves!

He had no intention of revealing such a powerful treasure to a relative stranger, but that did not mean he could explore the possibility of collaborating with her on developing a powerful new living mech that could leverage the power of electromagnetism like a domain shaper in advance!

Neither of the two mech designers were in a hurry, though. Both Ves and Master Ginevra possessed a lot of unique insights that could massively benefit the other party.

This formed the basis of a fruitful and mutually beneficial exchange. They spent an entire hour on trading useful tips and pieces of knowledge.

There was a definite sense of reciprocity in their words. Each of them revealed a part of their secrets in the hopes of gaining a secret of equal value in return.

As Ves enlightened Master Ginevra to the wonders of living mechs, design spirits and glows, the older woman rapturously listened and learned from the much younger mech designer.

She even developed her own insights based on all of the clues that she obtained.

"The key variable that binds all of your living mechs together is the so-called 'spirit' or 'soul'." The stately gray-haired lady noted with keen understanding in her eyes. "I agree with your claim that every human, alien, living mech or other sentient life form possesses an intangible spirit comprised out of E energy that forms the basis of their sapience. I have made my own independent observations of these spirits, but I do not have the capacity to create them or exploit them as extensively as you. That is part of your exceptional talent."

Ves grew more interested when the Master addressed this topic.

"Do you have any observations about spirits that you are willing to share?"

"I have developed my theories, but it remains to be seen whether they can be substantiated. What is relevant to you is that the existence of spirits and their importance to all life means that they can be targeted or manipulated. How easy is it for you to harm the spirits of other life forms directly?"

That was a rather sensitive question to answer, but Ves decided to provide a somewhat truthful answer.

"Mrow."

Blinky briefly appeared and generated a wisp of death energy before presenting it to Master Ginevra.

The quantity of death energy could pose a certain threat to human infants, but it was far from lethal enough to pose a serious threat against a Master Mech Designer.

Ginevra Hubert-Colmain did not even need to whip out a special scanner or anything. One of her eyeballs glowed brightly. It turned out that she had implanted herself with a high-tech cybernetic eye that could observe many different energy types!

After a dozen seconds of observation, she cautiously extended her hand and experienced the effect of death energy in a more physical manner. The brief moment of contact did not cause the Master Mech Designer any damage, but she still experienced a degree of discomfort.

"Remarkable. This negative form of E energy possesses a range of interesting properties. Is this the basis of your clan's famous battle formation attacks?"

The Penitent Sisters and the Glory Seekers had pulled off their characteristic battle formations often enough for the secret to become exposed.

The more Ves attracted attention, the more people scrutinized his past. It shouldn't be a surprise that these incessant investigators managed to acquire footage of the Valkyrie mechs channeling the power of Helena or the Superior Mother.

"That is correct, Master. This is death-attributed E energy. It can bypass all material defenses as if they do not exist and directly snuff out the spirits of life forms depending on their strength. It is a remarkably effective way to depopulate entire starships."

"Energy such as this should normally be anathema to all forms of life, but it is clear that you and several 'design spirits' are able to handle it without suffering harm. This is an interesting contradiction that I would love to explore if I am not already preoccupied with my own existing research projects. What I would like to point out is that you have been making heavy usage of spirits for many years, yet still do not comprehend them on a deeper level."

Ves frowned a bit. "You are talking about studying the fundamental principles of sentient life. This is way too big of a research project for a single Senior Mech Designer like myself. My goal is to design better mechs. It isn't necessary for me to crack all of the secrets that make life possible."

"I am not encouraging you to undertake this study straight away." Master Ginevra responded. "I am bringing this subject up to you in advance so that you have a clear understanding of what you will need to study next once you have reached a bottleneck in your progress. I anticipate that there may come a time where you can no longer advance any further unless you truly understand the essence of life. The secrets that you can obtain from this research may even form the basis of your subsequent ascension to Star Designer."

She was likely right. Ves smelled another grand design from this incredibly fascinating subject. That was also why he thought it was far too premature for him to engage in this deep and profound research direction.

His creation and exploitation of spirits may be relatively shallow, but he could already do much with his existing capabilities. Ves did not have an urgent desire to deepen his manipulation of life. It was much better to figure out how he could squeeze more value at his current level.

Minutes later, the conversation took a different turn. Ves began to inquire about how Master Ginevra managed to convert E energy into conventional electrical energy and vice versa.

The woman adopted a more confident demeanor. "This is not a difficult feat as long as your understanding of energy and many of its forms has advanced to a sufficient degree. There are many physicists that adhere to the theory that everything is an expression of energy."

"I am familiar with the theory. I happen to believe in it myself." Ves said.

His spiritual engineering endeavors taught him that there was not that much of a difference between spiritual energy and spiritual matter. The differences between the two were much less, making it easy for him to switch between one or the other.

Yet that was not what Master Ginevra wanted to teach.

"Even solid matter is merely a form of energy that has taken on a special form or state that causes them to be solidified. This is why it is not that difficult to convert matter into energy. What is important is that easy conversion also applies to many different exotic energies. They may possess radically different properties that do not share much in common with more mundane energy types, but they are actually two sides of the same coin. As long as you can identify and act on the commonalities between electrical energy and E energy, you can make the conversion yourself."

She made it sound easy, but was that truly the case?

"Have other mech designers managed to accomplish similar feats?"

The older woman nodded. "Yes, but few of their results are as good as mine. Energy specialists are capable of developing simple devices that can perform this transformation in either direction, but the efficiency and other parameters are too low. Mine is much better because I excel in transforming one energy type into another energy type. However, the ability to generate a large quantity of E energy means little if a mech cannot adequately make use of it. My applications are admittedly much cruder than yours."

"This is why I propose a collaboration between us." Ves eagerly said. "Your mechs can harness so much additional power that the potential is insane. We do not have to start a new mech design project from scratch. I am pretty sure that I can take your existing Montebra mech design and refine it to the point where it will no longer waste all of the excess E energy that your lancer mech is leaking like a sieve."

Master Ginevra did not immediately respond to that. She instead took the time to properly assess whether it made sense for her to collaborate with this young Senior on a mech design.

#### Chapter 5604 A Necessary Lesson

"The Montebra is a proof of concept more than anything." Master Ginevra admitted after a brief moment of silence. "There is value in the design, but it is more useful for its technological demonstration than its marketability. It is my judgment that the Montebra is a poor fit to the current state of the mech market. Lancer mechs are best employed against other mechs as opposed to alien starships. Even starfighters are not that much of a priority as they can easily be defeated by other mech types."

"I don't entirely agree with that assessment." Ves retorted. "If we can channel the amazing electromagnetism properties of your Montebra design in a more offensive and destructive capacity, we can develop a comprehensive new work that can overwhelm energy shields with powerful EMP-like discharges."

"I have considered that approach as well, but the strain on the mech is too great. Do you recall how my Montebbras short-circuited many of their internals? The mechanisms that I have used to generate an explosive amount of energies in a short time interval are too rough and unstable. The power output is too inconsistent and it is not yet possible for my work to offer sufficient protection against radical changes in the environment."

It became clear that Master Ginevra did not look forward to collaborating with Ves. That disappointed him a lot.

"Is there anything about this potential collaboration that does not sit well with you, Master?"

"It comes at an inopportune moment." She said. "I have received multiple solicitations after the conclusion of the challenge match. I have received invitations to participate in much more interesting collaborative research and design projects that are much more relevant to my specialization. One of the most important priorities that I have set is to develop a much more efficient and scalable electrical energy to E energy generator. Multiple research teams are working on this issue, and their work will eventually resound throughout our society. Once we are able to produce any type of E energy on demand, the Hyper Generation shall truly take off. The Red Two may very well organize a mid-generation announcement in order to spread the results of our critical research."

"I see."

In other words, the proposal made by Ves was too small in scope to interest the woman.

The performance and the special properties of the Montebra had showcased a lot of useful and interesting experimental design applications. They put Master Ginevra on the map and attracted the interest of big research institutions.

Perhaps... she may have received a direct invitation from a research team hailing from the Red Association!

Even if Ves was a tier 3 galactic citizen with a lot of unique and interesting insights, what Master Ginevra cared about the most was advancing her own design philosophy.

She could make a lot more gains in this area if she started to work together with many other like-minded specialists!

Ultimately, Master Ginevra simply did not prioritize the Montebra design. She did not want to convert it into a mature product because it did not reflect her full design ambitions.

Ves knew what sort of mech designer he was exchanging with. Master Ginevra Hubert-Colmain was a hardcore research addict. She could happily spend several decades in a research lab without designing any mechs during this time.

After he realized this, he no longer insisted on active collaboration.

"Since that is the case, can I still work with the Montebra design by myself?" He asked. "I truly believe that I can take the foundation that you have set in your experimental mech design and transform it into a truly powerful electrical lancer mech."

The Master Mech Designer shook her head. "I am afraid that I cannot allow that to happen. The Montebra contains many dangerous and unstable design elements that should not be handled by non-specialists. The mech is designed to channel strong energy surges, but it is actually not very effective at it. I fear that my work will one day produce deadly accidents due to improper adaptation and manipulation of these advanced components."

It was much more difficult for Ves to maneuver around that argument. The Montebra was indeed a mech that lived on the edge.

He sighed. "Very well. It appears that I have no future with the Montebra design. I understand your perspective. You are quite protective of your work."

"When my latest technologies are ready for widespread adoption, then I will be happy to allow you and any other peer in the mech industry to apply them onto their own works. Until then, it is better to limit their usage in order to protect mech pilots from accidents stemming from the use of immature tech."

There were mech designers who readily applied new and experimental tech onto their latest mech designs.

There were also other mech designers that insisted on following the strictest safety standards in order to minimize the possibility of preventable accidents.

It was difficult for the two to get along if they collaborated on the same project.

Ves was still too young. He managed to invent a lot of fantastic stuff, but his high pace of innovation also made it difficult for him to wait long enough for his new tech to get tested.

Master Ginevra was 180 years old and already accrued a lot of patience over the years. She was more than willing to hold herself back for a decade or so in order to obtain greater results.

"We are too different from each other." Ves tiredly remarked.

"You are an anomaly, Professor Larkinson." Master Ginevra pointed out. "You are still a Senior, but the contributions you have made are disproportionately high. You have advanced to your current position far too quickly. Few if any mech designer of your generation can equal your many feats. While I am not principally opposed to collaborating with a Senior Mech Designer, you are so young and successful that it causes me to question whether I have made the best use of my time when I was your age."

"Is the generational gap that much of a deal?"

The older woman looked at Ves with an exasperated expression.

"Masters such as myself are expected to be rational and objective enough to set aside any emotions that are not productive to the situation at hand. The reality is that we are still humans. Do you know how many mech designers of the older generation are jealous of your talent and accomplishments? Coming into direct contact with a brilliant prodigy such as you highlights their own inadequacies. This is especially the case when you have outshined them in their current states. You are a record-breaking tier 3 galactic citizen, while I am only a tier 6 galactic citizen. I can assure you that many other Masters whose galactic citizenships are much lower feel even more uncomfortable in your presence."

Ves did not expect to be confronted about this. He genuinely grew perplexed for a moment.

He was very much aware that he was an outlier in this regard, but he expected other Master Mech Designers to possess the age and maturity to look past these silly impulses.

Evidently, he expected too much from them. Their jealousy and feelings of inadequacy whenever they compared themselves to Ves clearly hindered them from seeking to collaborate with him on all kinds of interesting projects.

It was strange. Ves never really got the sense that Master Benedict Cortez and Master Decimus Horst wrestled with their conflicting feelings when they collaborated with him in the past.

Then again, they were very different mech designers.

Ves had developed a close friendship with Master Benedict Cortez. Both of them also benefited a lot from each other when they worked on groundbreaking mechs such as the Phobos.

Master Decimus Horst was a lot more tolerant and patient with Ves. He was an academic and an educator. He was a lot more serious and passionate about teaching the craft to the younger generation. That was also why he patiently taught Ves a lot of useful knowledge about heavy artillery mechs over the course of their collaboration.

What Ves needed to realize was that the two aforementioned Masters were the exception rather than the rule. He should not blindly assume that other high-ranking mech designers were willing to get outshined by a much younger but also much more talented colleague.

"Look to your own generation, professor. Few mech designers at your age have managed to advance to the rank of Senior Mech Designer, but the ones that have managed to do so are undoubtedly brilliant in their own fields of specializations. They are intelligent enough to develop their strengths to an extensive degree, but they are also young enough to hold the same ambitions and while also possessing the right amount of ignorance to blindly charge forward without fully understanding the repercussions of their design choices."

She made it sound as if young and fast-progressing mech designers like Ves were a bunch of reckless fools who would only egg each other on if they started to group together.

"Thank you... for your advice."

Master Ginevra gave him a patronizing smile. "I was young once too, many years ago. You are living your golden years as a mech designer. What is especially favorable to you is that you still possess the youthful energy that is typically associated with Journeymen, but you have also gained the competence that characterizes Seniors. That is a powerful combination, and it is one of the reasons why fast breakthroughs are so valued in our industry. Cherish your remaining time as a member of the younger generation, because it will not last. If you are able to break through fast enough, you may be able to extend this magical period."

Ves had no intention of wasting his time. He already held this mindset long before he exchanged with Ginevra Hubert-Colmain.

"What is it like to reach your age?" He curiously asked. "You emphasize the differences between my generation and yours so much that it is actually making me a little afraid of growing older."

"Aging is a natural process of life." Ginevra sighed. "Life-prolonging treatments and other tech has allowed us to extend that process, but that does not stop our mentalities from undergoing extensive generational shifts that causes us to look at our lives and the reality around us in a different manner. It is... harder for us to become passionate and fired up about anything. If we are unable to make any significant progress in developing our design philosophy, we simply cannot sustain our level of excitement. We become more detached from the moment and regard everything around us with an analytical or calculating mindset."

"So you are becoming more rational."

"Not completely, no. As I have mentioned before, we are still prone to negative feelings such as envy and jealousy. What matters is that it has become difficult for us to rely on our emotions to motivate us into working harder and breaking past our limits. This is also one of the reasons why mech pilots have a much lower chance of making any further breakthroughs once they become over a century old. We tend to believe that the future belongs to the younger generations. That reduces our drive to work harder."

"I see."

The lesson he received this time was a little general, but Ves valued it just as much as the technical knowledge shared by Master Ginevra.

Ves felt it may be better for him to reduce his interactions with Master Mech Designers. They were all a lot older and different from himself, making it harder to work together as equals.

It was much better to stick to mech designers around his own age like his wife and the other lead designers of the Design Department.

Now that he thought about it, he indeed felt a lot more comfortable and at ease whenever he collaborated with the likes of Ketis and Sara Voiken.

Though Ves had distanced himself from them by advancing to Senior early, they still got along with each other pretty well since they were close enough in age.

Chapter 5605 Enter the Atelier

The meeting with Master Ginevra Hubert-Colmain ultimately ended without the result that Ves desired.

Though he learned a lot about energy conversion and the properties of E energy in general, he failed to gain her agreement to collaborate on the Montebra design.

He did not blame her. She already taught him plenty of insights, and she was preoccupied with her own affairs.

The biggest regret was that he could not get her to exchange the principles of her TEMP mechanism to him. The experimental tech had a lot of potential, but it was too immature and posed too much of a threat to the mech and mech pilot in its current form. It was not responsible to hand it over to another mech designer who did not possess the technological qualifications to harness it correctly.

By the end of the lengthy exchange, both Ves and Master Ginevra stood up and shook hands yet again.

"I have great respect for your work." The older woman said in a more familiar tone. "It is a great honor to meet with a rising star in the industry such as yourself. I would not be surprised if you will catch up to my level in a few decades, and completely overtake my progress in a century or two. I feel more reassured with leaving the future of the mech industry and human civilization in the hands of the younger generation. The Great Severing may have cut us off from the old galaxy, but we have gathered so many of our best and brightest in the Red Ocean that I think we should be able to persevere."

Ves smiled back at her. "It will take a lot of time before we can step up and take charge of matters. We will have to count on our elders for quite a while, especially given how long you people are able to live."

"We may remain present in our society for longer than that. Longevity has become a much more active topic as of late. E energy radiation is changing all of us. There is increasing speculation that the previous limitations have already been broken. Many philosophers and ethicists have begun to ponder how our society will change if the older generations continue to remain present in people's lives for centuries to come. This will put an increasingly greater burden on the younger generations who will find that many channels for upward promotion remain closed due to the prevalence of highly qualified seniors."

That was an interesting debate, but not one that bothered Ves too much at the moment.

Cultivation had become a lot more accessible now that red humanity entered a medium-energy environment. It had already started to spread in disguised forms such as the release of the Hunter's Code.

Sooner or later, people would realize that all of these weird methods enabled people to retain their youth and longevity without paying for expensive life-prolonging treatments. That would give a lot of old people hope, but also make it so that they refused to pass on their wealth and positions to their descendants.

If Ves was in their shoes, he would also feel reluctant to pass everything he built over the course of his life to his children. He really couldn't blame either side for acting on their own self-interests.

The best way to relieve this potential time bomb was to expand the territories of red humanity and open up a lot of new opportunities for development. Yet that required a lot of fighting. Since many mech pilots tended to be under a century old, that effectively meant that the younger generations had to pay for these opportunities with their own blood and flesh.

How tragic!

It was good that the New Elites Program came to life. The empowerment of warlords granted the members of the younger generation a more direct pathway to power.

If everything proceeded as anticipated, then a lot of old and stagnant players would slowly make way for a vigorous new wave of courageous and dynamic warlords!

The only issue was that it would probably take a decade or two for these initiatives to produce the desired results.

All of the old geezers who owned a lot of property and held all of the reins of power still held a lot of sway at this time. There were plenty of ways for them to utilize their existing means to build lifelines for themselves. Many military fleets that had recently been mobilized and sent to the frontlines did so at the behest of their old masters.

Of course, Ves was essentially no different as his expeditionary fleet continued to fight the aliens while he remained safely in the rear, but oh well.

"If you ever make a breakthrough in your research involving the conversion of electrical energy to E energy, please give me a heads up." Ves cheekily requested. "My work is highly dependent on E

energy, but it is also limited by it. Having more of it on hand can make all of my mechs more powerful."

"The same applies to every other hyper mech. I will take your request into account, but I cannot make any promises. High-level research is usually locked behind confidentiality. It is not my place to reveal the results of a major collaborative project. However, you are already a tier 3 galactic citizen. You should be able to gain insider access through your own channels within the Red Association."

She had made a good point. His status was a lot different now. If not for the fact that his schedule was already packed, Ves would have felt tempted to ask Jovy whether he could get involved in one of the Red Association's many secret research initiatives.

Master Ginevra finally ended her visit and departed from the branch headquarters of the Larkinson Clan.

Ves reflected on his extensive exchange and discussion with the female Master for a time.

A priority event interrupted his musings.

"Ves!" Gavin barged into the office in a hurry. "Isthmus Manufacturing has just gotten back to us. The company's board of directors and major stakeholders have been deliberating over our counter-offer throughout the night and all the way up to this hour."

That was remarkably quick. The Rubarthans possessed a much more proactive attitude than the Terrans.

So long as they did not get hung up over difficult political disputes, the Rubarthans generally preferred to solve their problems sooner rather than later.

Still, a matter as big as handing up to 20 percent ownership of a massive mech manufacturer to an upstart foreign party shouldn't have been decided so quickly!

Ves expected the people behind Isthmus Manufacturing to make the most out of the time available to them and conduct as many analyses as possible. There was no certainty that this enormous deal would work out as well as everyone hoped.

"So what is their answer?"

"The Rubarthans did not say yes. Not yet, at least." Gavin responded as he reined in a bit of his excitement. "That said, they are this close to agreeing in principle. The only reason why they have yet to make their move is because the Impresario Prince himself wants to have a talk with you in person."

"So the ultimate decisionmaker has finally decided to come out of the shadows."

Neither Ves nor Gavin got caught off-guard by this move.

The Impresario Principality officially owned a 17.2 percent stake of Isthmus Manufacturing in the Red Ocean, and happened to be the largest shareholder of the company.

It had the most active voice by far among all of the other institutional shareholders. Pension funds, investment companies and other boring financial groups generally tended to be passive as long as their shares did not lose a lot of value all of a sudden.

It also wasn't a good idea to stand in the way of any member of the Rubarthan Imperial Household. A lot of people and organizations were willing to give way to a Rubarthan prince so long as their core interests remained unaffected.

All of this meant that Ves really only had to persuade the Impresario Prince in order to gain a powerful foothold in the Rubarthan Pact.

Gavin handed over a data pad that contained updated notes on what Ves should know about the eccentric prince.

"Prince Casevir is 5733rd Prince, so he is so far behind compared to the older princes that he doesn't really have a chance to ascend to the new throne. However, these princes are really good at hiding and obfuscating their true intentions, so do not take this as a given. The Impresario Prince may use Isthmus Manufacturing as bait to pull you over to his side. You will need to make your boundaries clear and express your lack of interest in getting involved in the succession battle."

Ves quickly skimmed through all of the analyses and summaries that painted a more detailed picture of the prince that had become famed for becoming a patron of the arts.

"I get it. How soon until the prince comes calling?"

"The Impresario Principality will establish an enhanced encrypted connection with us in 20 minutes. The local consulate of the Rubarthan Pact even shipped over a special single-use decryption device to make it extra secure."

"I see."

The effort put into this call made it clear that the Rubarthans were being utterly serious this time.

Ves used the remaining time to fix up his appearance and absorb more relevant data.

Once the time had come, Ves stood ready in his straightened outfit and waited for his entire environment to change.

He initially expected to meet with the physical projection of the Impresario Prince in his own little throne room or whatever.

Instead, the prince decided to bring Ves over to a virtual representation of his private atelier.

It was most definitely his personal art workshop because Ves saw a lot of incomplete and scrapped projects that should never be exposed to the public.

The works in the workshop made it clear that the Impresario Prince was a bit of a scatter-brained artist.

His artwork encompassed paintings, wood carvings, stone carvings, alloy castings and even projected virtual motion art!

However, many of his recent works appeared to be made out of scrap metal pieces that the prince had personally welded together.

The fairly crude and low-tech means to create bizarre artworks such as a metal bull that possessed the contours of a hoverbike resulted in a distinctive art style that resonated with Ves.

Even if the prince had not yet said anything, Ves could already tell from these works that they were attempts to create beauty from industrial castoffs.

The purple-haired man smiled as he witnessed his guest appreciate his work.

The century-old Rubarthan prince was dressed in a magnificent ensemble of white that looked way too delicate and formal to be worn in this atelier.

However, the prince was so comfortable in his own space that he somehow made it fit.

"Professor Larkinson. I have heard much about you as of late. I have been admiring your beautiful and dynamic mechs for a longer period than that. It is frustrating that your work is still limited to second-class mech designs. I look forward to the day when you are ready to debut a proper first-class mech."

Ves blinked. This was not how he expected to be greeted. He expected to meet with a dignified direct descendant of the renowned Seventh Star Emperor, not a fellow artist who held a lot of appreciation for his living mechs.

That was not the only surprise. When Ves started to pick up certain clues in the prince's most recent pieces of scrap metal art, his eyes minutely widened as he detected additional elements that caused the artworks to gain additional properties.

When Ves shifted his full attention to the physical projection of the Impresario Prince, he made an important realization.

Prince Casevir was a cultivator, and not an ordinary one either.

It turned out that he had become a creation cultivator!

## Chapter 5606 A Conversation Between Artists

Cultivators had become something of an open secret in the present day.

Those in the know had begun to practice whatever cultivation method that they could get their hands on. Few if any of them felt inclined to draw attention to what they managed to gain because they were all motivated by selfish intentions.

Human society was very much hierarchical and based on competition. Only a small proportion of people had a chance of occupying the positions at the top.

The more competent and capable they became, the greater the chance they could climb up the ladder.

It became a lot harder to defeat the competition if their rivals started to practice the same cultivation methods that made them smarter or better at their jobs.

This was why the earliest wave of human cultivators all abided by an unspoken rule. Every beneficiary implicitly colluded with each other to prevent the general public from learning about the wonders of cultivation.

Nobody knew how long this would last. The barrier of secrecy could collapse any day now, though Ves privately guessed that the current status quo could probably be maintained for a couple more years.

While the general public still lived their lives as if hardly anything changed from the Age of Mechs, the upper echelon had already begun to take advantage of the cultivation methods that they managed to obtain.

There were two major sources of cultivation methods.

The most common one was that these people managed to dig them up from their dusty archives. The problem with that was that the methods were generally obtuse and filled with strange meanings. The mechanics behind them were also highly inconsistent.

Examples such as the Hunter's Code showed that there were people out there that possessed the ability to formulate their own new cultivation methods. Only genuine high-level cultivators should be able to do this. Since they were exceedingly rare in the Red Ocean, Ves did not expect that many people had access to more modern cultivation methods.

Right now, Ves wondered which category Prince Casevir fell into. Was his background good enough to obtain a modern and much less confusing solution, or had he begun to practice a creation cultivation method that was many ages old?

The answer to this question was extremely important! It could mean the difference between doing business with a rational cultivator or getting involved with a complete nutcase!

Until Ves figured out the answer, he needed to display a lot of restraint and avoid making too many promises.

"Your art is beautiful." Ves complimented. "I can see from the works around us that you have the heart of a true artist. I did not expect that a highborn scion such as yourself would work with low-value pieces of scrap, but you have treated each and every component with a level of care and respect that is rare. It is impressive to see how you have managed to turn these ugly and malformed pieces of salvaged metal into beautiful and surprisingly harmonious pieces of artworks. I especially like how you have successfully generated aesthetically pleasing designs from irregular patterns."

Everyone liked to be complemented by their work. Ves was no exception to this rule. He knew exactly how to stroke the egos of creatives.

Just as predicted, Prince Casevir's initially concentration expression bloomed in a smile that looked so handsome on his already dashing face that it had to have been engineered to perfection!

"I appreciate your feedback, professor. It means much coming from a renowned artist and mech designer such as yourself." The Impresario Prince responded with a lyrical voice that straddled the line between masculinity and femininity. "Alas, I am far from reaching my height despite the years that I have dedicated to my various crafts. I have yet to create a single masterwork. You on the other hand have managed to accrue 9 masterwork certificates. I still do not know how a mech designer less than half my age is able to turn the most complicated and technologically challenging machines into genuine works of art and beauty."

Was this what the Rubarthan prince paid attention to the most? It was quite a surprise, but it made sense in hindsight.

"I am a mech designer, Your Highness." Ves respectfully stated the obvious. "Since I was a teenager, I have dedicated almost every day of my life to designing better mechs. While my interests are broad, they mostly remain confined within the sphere of mechs. All of that effort and dedication in a single craft has paid off in a big way."

The Rubarthan Prince chuckled at that. "You are being too modest, Professor Larkinson. Hardly any mech designer of your generation has managed to advance to Senior so soon. You have also set a

new record and proved to the entire mech industry that Journeyman are capable of fabricating masterwork mechs as well. No one else who has spent as much time and effort into improving their mech design skills has come close to matching your illustrious accomplishments. You are one of a kind. Your art and vision sings through your living mechs."

"I am pleased to hear that you appreciate my mech designs, but I am hardly the only mech designer who expresses their art through their works. Every high-ranking mech designer imbues their designs with their own charm. I am sure that your colonial superstate has many talents that are able to create aesthetically pleasing mechs in their distinctive styles."

"You are correct in that, but their artworks are too... polished." The Impresario Prince briefly frowned. "None of the mech designers whose work that I admire is younger than myself. Each of them has completed a lengthy journey before advancing to Master. Once they have reached this advanced stage in their life, their artstyle has already reached a stage of maturity. Their works are still as beautiful as ever, but... their evolution has stalled. There is no progression between mech designs anymore."

Ves felt the need to stand up for his elders. This was his obligation as a mech designer.

"I can understand your perspective, Prince Casevir, but I disagree with the notion that Master Mech Designers have stagnated in their work. Many of them are engaged in incredibly difficult research projects that can easily span for decades. It is customary for them to make relatively little progress for many years. Only when they have attained critical success in their ambitious research projects will their works be completely reinvigorated. We haven't seen much of that as of late as the Phasewater Generation only lasted for about a decade while the Hyper Generation has just begin."

The Impresario Prince clearly did not agree with Ves' argument. He openly shook his head while expressing clear disdain towards those old and terribly slow Masters.

"That is no excuse for them to slack off and rest on their laurels. For whatever reason, from the moment they have realized their design philosophies and attained one of their greatest dreams, they slow down and stop feeling any urgency. It seems as if anything that took years to complete now takes decades to produce any substantial progress. This is why I prefer younger artists and mech designers such as yourself. You are still in the prime of your life, and it shows in how productive you are. Your design style is constantly evolving. The Fey Fianna that you have released most recently are a far cry from the works that you have designed during the Phasewater Generation."

Though the 5733rd prince possessed an extensive understanding of mech designers, he was ultimately a layman. He was not initiated into the craft nor designed a mech of his own. How could he possibly understand all of the difficult burdens of Master Mech Designers?

Reaching Master might seem like a fantastic accomplishment, but it was ultimately not as significant as everyone assumed.

A Master Mech Designer was just a domain shaper in the end!

Compared to the true magnificence of a Star Designer, every Master Mech Designer was like a child.

However, Ves did not accept this call to debate about this kind of stuff. He still remembered that he was here to talk about a potential agreement about obtaining partial ownership in a large Rubarthan company.

He coughed. "I am still exploring my craft, Your Highness. It is in the process of doing so that I have gained an interest in Isthmus Manufacturing. I have many ambitions as a mech designer, but I am unable to pursue them as freely as I like due to logistical constraints. I think there are many grounds for cooperation between my mech company and Isthmus Manufacturing. With the help of the latter, I can introduce many of my works to a brand new set of consumers who reside in the Rubarthan Pact."

The Impresario Prince grew a little more serious now that Ves addressed the main topic for this call.

"Good art like yours indeed deserves to be appreciated by a wider audience." The prince nodded in agreement. "I normally do not intervene in person whenever Isthmus Manufacturing has signed a new contract with a mech designer, but your case is different. You are the first to turn what should have been a simple business transaction into a mutual investment deal. It is not unacceptable to grant you shares in Isthmus Manufacturing, but I expect much more from you in order to justify this extreme measure."

Ves grew a little nervous. "Is my work to your satisfaction?"

"I adore your work, as you can already tell, professor. I have few objections to allowing Isthmus Manufacturing to produce your mechs and handle all of the downstream activities related to them within the Rubarthan Pact. The greatest issue I have with your work so far is that they are only limited to second-class mech designs."

"I am working hard to gain the qualifications of a first-class mech designer. I am a quick study, so it should only take a few years before I can present a first-class mech of my own design."

"That is to be expected." The prince nodded in an approving manner. "The other major issue is that your asking price is too excessive. The valuation of Isthmus Manufacturing is astronomical. It is a centuries-old mech manufacturer with a long heritage of stable business and prudent decision-making. It has developed close contacts and partnerships across multiple networks. With my help, the recently reorganized Red Ocean division of this company has not only maintained its footing in the rapidly changing economic situation of the Rubarthan Pact, but it has also managed to increase its footprint by acquiring dozens of distressed smaller mech companies."

"Your Highness, I understand that Isthmus Manufacturing is a valuable mech company, but my value is no less impressive. It is not a loss to give me a 20 percent stake in your company." Ves insisted.

The Impresario Prince shook his head as he began to show the attitude that was expected from a true blood descendant of the current Star Emperor.

"As great as your potential may be, it will take many years for you to live up to your promises. It is not too late for you to acquire more shares by drawing from your own warchest. In the meantime, it is much more appropriate for you to start your long-term cooperation with Isthmus Manufacturing with a more proportionate degree of ownership. It is relatively customary in the mech industry at our level to bestow Master Mech Designers with a 1 to 3 percent stake in a company. Given the high demand and the beautiful artistry of your recent mech designs, I have little objections to granting you the treatment of a Master as opposed to a Senior."

This was a huge step down compared to his initial asking price!

If Prince Casevir thought that Ves was willing to gamble, then he guessed wrong!

"I am afraid I cannot agree with this, Your Highness. I progress quickly, so it takes much less time for me to realize my potential. I do not want my mechs to be controlled by a company that I can hardly influence, so I must insist on meeting my original demand."

It looked like this was going to be a difficult negotiation.

## Chapter 5607 The Motivation of an Artist

Ves was not willing to budge from his initial demand.

20 percent ownership was his bottom line. If not for the fact that he feared he might scare off the Rubarthans entirely if he demanded a higher figure, he would have asked for 40 percent instead!

The downside of setting such a high demand in the beginning was that the pressure to relent and settle for a lower figure was too great.

It was customary for both sides to make painful concessions in order to meet each other halfway.

Ves did not want to do that. He had no intention of weakening his position until he only gained a fraction of what he sought.

How could he do that?

He could pull out the Novastella statue or present the Supremo Project again, but he had the feeling that it probably wouldn't work.

His previous call with Micky Tarukan could easily be recorded and played back to every relevant party. Ves would not introduce anything new if he simply repeated his earlier actions.

He needed to approach this negotiation from a different angle.

How could he persuade the Impresario Prince to give Ves a much greater share of a large and profitable mech company than normal?

Ves took another look around the workshop.

The 5733rd Prince was born far too late.

Due to having at least 5732 older siblings, Prince Casevir was so far behind in the race that his chances of ascending to the throne were too slim.

This was true in both the old galaxy and the new frontier.

The competition may be a lot less intense in the Red Ocean, but all of the older princes that managed to get caught in this side of the greater beyonder gate were not incompetent.

Whether it was the Smokestack Prince who quietly managed to gain widespread influence across entire economic sectors or the Inferno Spear Prince who possessed the greatest martial strength among the princes, each of them possessed strong advantages that gave them a much more solid foundation in the battle for the throne.

As for Prince Casevir, his principality was not a big deal. His low position in the imperial hierarchy also made him rather unattractive to many Rubarthan players who wanted to gain the patronage of a prince.

However, he was not one of the many thousands of useless princes who gave up on any pretense of doing anything useful in their lives.

The Impresario Prince gained his name by investing a lot of resources and effort into building a media empire. His soft power had grown to a considerable height after he became in charge of many different media and entertainment companies.

He also subsidized a lot of artists, causing these cultural influencers to always say a good word about their generous patron.

All of this enabled the Impresario Prince to gain a benevolent reputation within Rubarthan society.

He was not a prince that Rubarthans would think of when they thought about the most likely candidates to inherit the throne, but he was definitely a prince who had made them laugh and cry through the many works he sponsored.

Even though drama broadcasts and art exhibitions could not win him any battles, the prince's dedication to his art betrayed a certain element of ambition.

It was subtle, but that was because Prince Casevir had only gotten started as a creation cultivator.

Ves and Blinky had been making constant observations all this time. They closely examined all of the clues they could find from his various artworks as well as his evolving spirituality.

The clues painted a certain picture that Ves was not certain about.

The Impresario Prince was most definitely passionate about his art, but his motives may not be so pure.

The purpose of creating all of these works was not to entertain or enrich the lives of his audience.

Instead, Ves gained the sense that the Rubarthan prince's various works were made with the subtle purpose of manipulating the audience.

Although all forms of art sought to manipulate the people who experienced them in one way or another, the motives were usually more innocent and benign.

Ves did not see that in the works of Prince Casevir. His latest works which consisted entirely of reworked and welded pieces of scrap metal evoked a stronger and more abrasive impression.

If ordinary people viewed these works, they would probably gain a different impression of their maker.

Instead of regarding the Impresario Prince as a sophisticated and cultured patron of the arts, they would instead begin to view him as a prince who was much tougher and firmer than he appeared on the surface.

This was not due to the subtle spiritual effect that the fledgling cultivator managed to imbue in his artwork.

It was the weak effect combined with the striking visuals of his scrap metal art that produced a considerably stronger composite effect!

It was rather ingenious. Ves imagined that this was how many art-oriented creation cultivators worked.

They might not be able to craft anything as powerful as an artifact sword or as technologically imposing as a combat mech, but extraordinary artists had their own way of earning their place in the cultivation community!

What was the ambition of the Impresario Prince?

What did he seek to accomplish by embracing a niche form of creation cultivation?

Ves refused to believe that Prince Casevir did not have access to more direct and powerful qi cultivation methods.

He could collect a lot of clues from observing an artist's personal atelier, but Prince Casevir only started to settle on a new course well after the Age of Dawn had begun.

This presented far too little clues for Ves to make any definite conclusions.

Ves had little choice but to make an educated guess and hope his bet paid off. It would be terribly awkward if he had misjudged the situation.

"I see you care a lot about your art, Your Highness." Ves stated as he inexplicably turned the conversation back to the initial topic. "Your skills and foundation are strong. I expect nothing less from a Rubarthan prince who has access to the best tutors and the most luxurious learning facilities. What is impressive is that you did not merely rely on the conveniences of your high birth. I can see you are not afraid of getting your hands dirty in order to shape your work by hand. That is an admirable quality for a man of your high station."

The prince looked amused at Ves. A prince as old and educated as him should definitely recognize the ham-fisted attempt at changing the topic.

"My accomplished tutors have given me well-meaning advice that I have followed to the end. A true artist must not be afraid of spending long hours in hardship and isolation. What we present to the public are only brief instances of our lives. Every beautiful piece that has reached completion is the result of long hours of toiling behind the scenes. To be honest, I have reached a bottleneck in my art journey several decades ago. Try as I might, I have failed to create a masterwork that I can truly take pride in. This has been one of my persistent regrets. Several of my older siblings have already managed to succeed where I have failed."

The prince genuinely sounded regretful about this, and Ves did not doubt the other man's integrity.

While there was a chance that this entire setup was a giant performance staged by a prince that was also passionate about acting and stage plays, Ves did not think that he was meeting a false version of the Impresario Prince.

If the man truly wanted to improve his art to the point where he could make a masterwork from his own hands, then Ves might be able to teach him a few tricks.

"Both of us share something in common." Ves claimed. "You are known as a supporter of the arts. I happen to be a supporter of artists myself. I am sure you have already conducted a thorough investigation of me. Have you heard of the Creation Association?"

The well-dressed prince nodded. "I have studied the information. It is... interesting. It is gaining an increasing amount of traction within the second-class arts and crafts community. It is clear that you are providing added value to the many artists and craftsmen who are struggling to find a way forward." "Have you ever gained an interest in making use of its services?"

"I did consider this possibility." The prince replied. "I rejected it because I have found another way to develop my art. Can you see the progress that I have made through my most recent works?"

Ves nodded. "I can see that you are gradually becoming more proficient at imparting your works with greater meaning."

Prince Casevir became a little more intense. "What is the purpose of art? Why do people dedicate their lifetimes to practicing music, painting expansive vistas or creating sculptures that represent great figures whose names shall resound in history?"

"Is it because they want to record their lives and history so that the later generations can gain an understanding of our current struggles?"

"That can serve as a possible motivation for some artists, but that is not my purpose. I see little reason to leave behind a record for our distant descendants when I still have many years left to shape my own life. No. I seek to improve my art in order to achieve greatness, just as you. Is it not fulfilling to become known as a great artist and be appreciated for it? Is it not a dream to be able to gain so much weight in your community that everyone will respect your words and deeds? My art seeks to impress the masses and make them acknowledge my greatness as a maker and a visionary!"

That... was a rather egoistic motivation to become an artist. That did not make it any less valid.

Plenty of artists throughout human history had gone on to make historical masterpieces that still received a lot of appreciation to this day due to ego trips.

All an artist needed in order to succeed was ability and fame.

Prince Casevir definitely enjoyed a massive advantage in the latter solely due to his high birth. It was his ability that he was struggling to improve.

To be honest, for him to reach this level after a century of life was rather mediocre to put it nicely.

There were many more artists from much more humbler backgrounds who had already gone on to make unforgettable masterworks in half the time!

It was abundantly clear to Ves that the prince did not really possess an inherent talent in the arts. It did not help that he invested his time in way too many different forms of art.

Such a man could benefit from having more expert guidance.

"I see. Trying to achieve greatness in any craft is a noble goal, but if I am being honest, your current results are not too stellar." Ves cautiously said.

"I do not deny that my works are far from reaching your standard." The prince honestly admitted. "I am working to remedy my shortcomings. With the help of ancient wisdom, I have finally managed to make visible progress in my own art. What you see in my atelier is only the beginning. Once I become increasingly more adept at channeling and shaping E energy into my works, my future pieces may one day be able to command the attention of their viewers in a similar fashion to the glows of your living mechs!"

Ves just gained a key piece of information.

"Are you interested in learning the secrets to imparting your works with glows, Your Highness?"

The prince shook his head. "Glows are a defining characteristic to your own works. I would merely be imitating you rather than engage in an act of original creation if I copy your methods."

"Do not be so quick to refuse. Even if you do not intend to learn my methods, you can still use it as inspiration to develop your own toolbox as an artist.

The Creation Association is quite experienced in doing this. It has helped many craftsmen find their own way."

#### Chapter 5608 The Sad Lives of Rubarthan Princes

"Your Creation Association has helped many struggling artists and craftsmen." Prince Casevir sincerely praised Ves. "If it was not confined to the middle zones of the Red Ocean Union, I may have already paid a visit to one of its branches. However, I am no longer a student. I am an accomplished artist myself. There is a fine line between learning and imitation. How can I keep my head high if the only reason that I am able to progress my art is because I took lessons from a mech designer who started out as a lowly third-rater and is more than half my age? I would become a laughing stock among my peers!"

Ves furrowed his brows. He was pretty sure that he and Vulcan could provide helpful guidance to the Impresario Prince, but the man was so damn prideful and stubborn that he refused to accept his help!

He would love nothing more than to take out his Hammer of Brilliance and whack the Rubarthan Prince in the head.

Even though they were only communicating by remote, he was pretty sure that Vulcan could channel his power all the way to the other end of the encrypted communication channel and produce at least a partial effect on the subject in question!

The Impresario Prince was over a century old, and he spent much of his life struggling to develop himself into a successful artist. His frequent dabbling in different art fields caused him to accumulate a lot of messy and scattered knowledge.

As a mech designer who dabbled in many different fields himself, Ves understood how challenging it was to tie all of these loose ends together and formulate creative new solutions based on synergies that had never been established before.

It only took a single moment of inspiration to give people the push to unite all of their previous efforts into a breakthrough of their methods.

Ves let out an exasperated sigh. "I may be younger than you, Your Highness, but I am pretty sure that I am your senior in terms of the quality of my work and the contributions that I have made to society. It is not a shame for you to make use of my services. Isn't it your dream to create your first masterwork? I happen to have a decent amount of experience in guiding others into making their own brilliant works. The Creation Association maintains a record of such cases. My direct guidance has also allowed my wife and my former student Ketis to create their own masterwork mechs."

Despite this well-sounding argument, the prince still refused this earnest offer of assistance.

"You do not understand, professor. I am not being willful because I lack the maturity to accept a helping hand. I am a son of the greatest Rubarthan alive. As long as I am a member of the Rubarthan Imperial Household, I am obliged to uphold its honor and reputation at all times. I am not allowed to display any flaws. This is the burden that I must bear for my entire life. My rival siblings will not hold back in exploiting anything that tarnishes my name. If my transgressions are

severe enough, then my good brothers and sisters will make certain that I no longer remain a problem in order to preserve the dignity of our imperial father. Not every prince born from his blood has survived to this day."

"That sounds... pretty serious..."

Ves felt that the Impresario Prince was a rather sad figure.

As the 5733rd Prince of the Rubarthan Imperial Household, the man had been born into one of the most privileged positions in human civilization.

The New Rubarth Empire may have been diminished after the tragic end of the Age of Conquest, but it had still retained a strong foundation. There was still a good possibility that it may rise to its former glory in the distant future.

The first hundred-or-so princes born from the bloodline of the Seventh Star Emperor enjoyed a great advantage. They occupied all of the most important institutions and built up incredibly expansive power bases that allowed them to maintain a stranglehold over Rubarthan society to this day.

There was little left for the later princes to occupy, particularly when they had to compete against thousands of brothers and sisters at the same time!

No one knew what the Seven Star Emperor had in mind when he kept producing offspring like there was no tomorrow, but it left his later descendants in a particularly awkward position.

On the one hand, they were genuine members of the Rubarthan Imperial Household, which was by far the strongest and most authoritative institution in their superstate! Their nominal status was exceedingly high and they received the best augmentations and education as they grew up in big and opulent palaces.

On the other hand, they were incredibly pitiful because their eldest siblings possessed such a fantastic head start that the younger princes simply couldn't catch up anymore. Even the figures of high society no longer took the younger royals all that seriously anymore because the older princes made sure to keep them away from actual positions of power and authority!

The younger Rubarthan imperial scions therefore had to find their own way in life.

The Inferno Spear Prince was regarded as one of the most successful to find his own path. He had made good use of his genetic aptitude and managed to excel in the military. After becoming a peak ace pilot, the 2016th Prince managed to build up so much prestige that none but the oldest princes dared to push him around anymore!

The Smokestack Prince was a lot older than most of his siblings, yet the 476th Prince was still born a bit too late to take control over a large mech army group or an important government department. This was why he boldly took a risk and utilized his large disposable wealth and his keen judgment to build an expansive business empire!

Compared to these giants, the Impresario Prince had nothing special that could persuade other players to flock to his side. His chances of winning any throne, whether it was the Coldstone Throne or the new one in the Red Ocean that had yet to be built, were almost zero!

The only realistic way for the Impresario Prince to beat the 150 princes and princesses that had set up shop in the Red Ocean was for the current frontrunners to suffer accidents that forced them to end their participation in the succession battle.

That was not a serious plan at all! There were dozens of princes that were much more powerful than the Impresario Prince. It was impossible for all of them to be stupid and reckless enough to put themselves out of the fight.

What sort of life was left for this prince?

As Ves examined the prince who clearly wanted to excel in art yet found himself a bit lacking in talent and creativity, he wondered what was truly driving Casevir forward.

Attaining greatness sounded like a reasonable goal, but it did not sound comprehensive enough to sustain this kind of personality. There had to be more to him that made up the complete picture.

In order to obtain additional answers, Ves needed to prod the artist further.

He relaxed his posture and looked closer into Prince Casevir's eyes.

The man clearly felt conflicted about a lot of stuff, yet he hardly revealed any of it through his body language and his expression.

However, Ves could clearly sense the inner turmoil from the prince's strengthened but unstable spirituality.

The prince was still a fledgeling cultivator and had yet to develop the mental strength and discipline to control his spiritual fluctuations.

"I don't understand you." Ves plainly admitted. "You work hard in order to attain greatness, but why have you set your sights on this goal? What is your purpose? Are you trying to find meaning in your existence, or do you have ambitions for the throne?"

The mention of the latter elicited a stern reaction from the prince!

"Do not mention that subject even in passing!" The Impresario Prince sharply rebuked Ves! "It is taboo, especially to foreigners such as yourself. I have stated numerous times in the past that I have no interest in making enemies out of all of my fellow princes. I am fully prepared to support any of my siblings who have managed to overcome all opposition and ascend to the new throne. I would happily give up my princely title when the new emperor has taken his rightful place."

The Rubarthan Imperial Household was already too big and immense due to the unceasing efforts of the Seventh Star Emperor.

The situation was hardly better during the reign of past sovereigns as hundreds of princes and princesses all drained a lot of resources in order to satisfy their many needs.

In order to prevent the imperial institution from getting crushed under its own weight, it had taken up a rule that simply deprived every brother or sister of the current Star Emperor of their titles.

Not only that, but they also had to resign from any high positions and give back most of what the Rubarthan Imperial Household originally awarded them.

Though the disruptions were usually great, this was the only way to defang the losing Rubarthan princes and prevent them from challenging the only sibling to succeed.

Compared to the old princes who would undoubtedly crash hard as they lost much of the support and official authority that they enjoyed before, the Impresario Prince was in a much better position. His status hadn't been all that high to begin with, so he wouldn't lose all that much when he crashed. He would still be able to retain ownership in all of his entertainment studios and his shares in various companies. He had managed to build them up through spending his own money and putting in his own effort after all. His control over these sectors also wasn't overbearing enough to provoke the intervention of any regulatory institutions.

The story was much different for the Smokestack Prince. His influence and control over the business and industrial sector of the Rubarthan Pact was so expansive that a newly ascended emperor would never be able to tolerate a former competitor retaining so much sway over an entire superstate.

This was why the Smokestack Prince had no choice to compete. He had already disgraced himself once. He stood to lose almost everything that he had built yet again if he faltered yet again!

"Since you have no ambition for the throne, why is it so important for you to attain greatness, Your Highness?" Ves asked. "I can see from your artwork that you are obsessed with this goal. It is actually starting to hollow out your art. Don't think that your new cultivation method will turn you into a better artist. Your latest works may be more sophisticated in a few aspects, but their value may not necessarily be greater. Personally speaking, I enjoy viewing your older works a lot more than your latest ones."

That startled the prince!

"What do you find objectionable about my newest works? Are my techniques too crude? Am I misusing the raw materials?"

"Your technique is fine." Ves reassured the prince. "It is your vision that I have problems with. I do not doubt your passion, but if you continue to proceed down this direction, your future body of art will increasingly center around satisfying your ego as opposed to enriching our society. As an artist, do you not recognize that you are supposed to work at the behest of the public rather than the other way around? You should never force others to appreciate your personal interpretation of art!"

The aggressive and domineering pieces of art in the atelier did not leave much room for different interpretations. They lacked the ambiguity of good works of art and instead tried to ram Prince Casevir's emotions down the throats of their viewers!

This was not art in Ves' opinion. This was abuse!

## Chapter 5609 Crushing Expectations

Artists needed to develop thick skin in order to survive in their line of work.

They earned their livelihoods by presenting their works to the public.

A crowd contained all kinds of random people and personalities. Each of them could supply very different feedback from uncritical praise to a torrent of horrible insults.

Of course, the Impresario Prince's identity vastly limited the amount of flaming he received, but he must otherwise suffer the same tribulations as any other artist.

Given the fact that the man had stuck by his career for so long, Prince Casevir must have been able to develop his own way of coping with harsh criticism. Such an artist should no longer be easily swayed by any feedback, no matter whether it was positive or negative.

They had found their own vision, and unflinchingly pursued it with the sincere belief that there was a place for their work in the society they were a part of. Each and every creation contributed to a body of work that could serve as a monument that could inspire the public for many years to come.

Perhaps the Impresario Prince used to be on his way of building a legacy that could withstand the test of time and avoid the fate of becoming one of the many thousands of princes whose names would be forgotten after their passing.

Yet the most recent turn of events painted a much more ominous picture. The Great Severing changed many people's futures. The only question was whether it was for the better or for the worse.

So far, Ves did not believe that gaining access to cultivation was doing Prince Casevir any good.

Ves did not hide his judgmental attitude. Since the Impresario Prince had put up a wall, it was time to exert more pressure!

At this time, Ves did not really pay attention to Casevir's identity as a prince. As far as he was concerned, the Impresario Prince was a desperate artist. Vulcan had guided many of them over the course of performing duties in the Creation Association.

Ves moved closer and leaned forward until he tapped his finger onto the physical projection of one of the more recent scrap metal artworks.

Although he was only able to touch an illusionary representation of Casevir's work, it was realistic enough to portray its essence.

"Your work is beautiful, but only on the surface." Ves critiqued. "Let me be honest, Your Highness. It is painful for me to see how you have put decades worth of skill and technique to use in this fashion. Any other artist in your shoes would have been able to fashion these pieces of metal together in a work that can serve the public in different ways. Yet out of all of the possible reasons for you to make your latest works, you have solely fixated on satisfying your own shallow ego. Your earlier work has earned my respect, but ever since you have practiced whatever cultivation method that you have acquired, you have completely misunderstood what your profession is all about. The fact that you are incapable of recognizing your fault is a sign that you are not able to control the negative repercussions of your cultivation."

Qualified artists generally possessed the ability to deflect harsh critique, but everyone had their limits!

Ves was a creator himself, so he understood much better than ordinary people how to identify and exploit the weak points of an artist like Prince Casevir!

This became evident when the Impresario Prince's impeccable training and education could no longer restrain his rising anger and indignation!

The Rubarthan prince wanted to deny the faults right away, but it was difficult for him to counter legitimate criticism.

What was even worse was that the identity and the qualifications of the person who had supplied all of the critique was much greater than his own in this field!

Under all of this negative stimulation, the sequelae of his cultivation method became more pronounced!

"I am not regressing!" The prince slammed his fist against his work table! "As accurate as you may be, I am still in the process of reorienting my art and my vision. As long as I have gained a greater level of mastery in my art, my greatness shall spread throughout the Rubarthan Pact!"

Ves shook his head in disappointment. "All I see is an artist losing control over himself. Just think about what you want to make as of late. Have you truly thought about creating a work that serves a purpose beyond imposing your will onto others?"

"What is so objectionable about that, professor? Shouldn't artists take pride in their skills? Regardless of my intentions, a work of art that looks pleasing will always earn people's appreciation."

"Artwork can inspire people to do great things. Artwork can help people process their trauma. Artwork can entertain and brighten people's lives. No matter whether your motives are noble or utilitarian, the common denominator is that the artist must hold the mindset of serving people other than themselves. No matter whether they seek to fulfill the needs of a single client or satisfy as many people as possible, a qualified artist must prove that he exerts a positive influence on society in order to justify his existence. I don't know who you want to prove yourself to, but if you keep developing in this direction, you will continually disgrace yourself within the art community!"

Ves did not employ his glow or any other special tricks to make his point. Such cheap ploys wouldn't work against a highly trained and augmented Rubarthan prince.

The only weapons he employed against this prince were sound logic and his authority as a certified masterwork mech designer.

Both of these factors together turned Ves into an invincible monster!

"Tell me, Casevir." Ves commanded as he started to loom over the Impresario Prince. "What is driving you down this path? What are you trying to prove? Be honest. As an artist, you can lie to other people, but you cannot be dishonest about yourself. Denying your problems will only prevent you from making corrective actions that can bring you closer to realizing a more ambitious vision."

A Rubarthan prince should never casually expose his weakness to others, especially during a remote call that may or may not be perfectly secure.

There were many reasons why Prince Casevir should cut this inquiry short or even end the connection outright, but the part of him that was an earnest artist as opposed to a prideful prince cried for help.

When the Impresario Prince recalled all of the amazing and beautiful masterwork mechs that the famous patriarch of the Larkinson Clan had built, a burning desire surged in his heart!

"Fine." The older man spoke after he endured the continual incitement from Ves. "If you insist on knowing the truth, then I shall tell you. It is not that difficult to deduce. The overarching reason why I must attain greatness in my field is because the court has set this expectation on me since my birth."

Ves blinked. That did not sound like a big revelation to his ears.

"Uhh..."

"You are not native Rubarthan, so I do not expect you to comprehend this. Bloodlines are not equal. Many Rubarthans believe that the bloodlines of the more successful and enduring families are inherently superior than the rest. That does not mean that commoners are unable to excel and outperform those who were born in higher stations. There are bad apples in every family. What matters is that the descendants of the higher and more exalted houses are much more likely to outperform their peers."

"Ah." Ves said as he understood where the prince was going with this. "The bloodline of the seven Star Emperors is the most exalted of all. The expectations that your society puts on every single Rubarthan prince must be insanely high."

Prince Casevir pressed his lips. "It is not just the expectations of society that we must meet. We must also fight to command the attention of our great father. Do you know how many times I have met His Majesty in person?"

That was a difficult question. Ves had no idea how much the Star Emperor cared about each individual child.

He made a guess. "Thrice?"

"No. Once. He attended my birth in passing. He only glanced at my infant body a single time before expressing his hope and expectation that I can live up to the bloodline of emperors. Then he left without even bothering to hold me in his arms."

Wow. There were fathers, and there was the Seventh Star Emperor.

It was no wonder that Prince Casevir was so hung up over himself!

If Ves grew up with a 'wonderful' father like the current Star Emperor, he would also become desperate to earn his daddy's approval!

"Our great father is a busy statesman." The Impresario Prince continued to spill his story.

"Thousands of children are competing for his attention. In this regard, he has set a simple rule. Only the most impressive and successful princes are qualified to earn his personal attention. He does not play favorites in this regard because he must show that even his own lineage must abide by meritocratic principles."

"I see..."

"My great father determined the course of my life before I was conceived." Casevir said. "When he took a liking to one of the distinguished court artists more than a hundred years ago, the geneticists and other specialists worked to combine the original genes of my great father and my highly accomplished mother to produce a child that should theoretically combine the best of both worlds."

"Genetics do not work that way." Ves frowned. "People are products of both nature and nurture. The former only sets the upper and lower boundaries of what individuals can reach over the course of their lives. It is how they are raised and how they navigate their lives that ultimately determine their ultimate place. As far as I am concerned, bloodline alone is no guarantee for critical success."

"Do you think I am not aware of that?!" The prince barked at Ves! "The Rubarthan Imperial Household is very much aware of the high variability between the princes. This is why an overwhelming majority of my brothers and sisters have never managed to catch our great father's attention after they were born."

"Isn't it unfair to expect younger offspring such as yourself to compete against the first hundred or so princes?"

Prince Casevir shook his head. "Our great father is not unfair in this regard. I am not expected to become an equal to the oldest of my siblings. The only requirement that I have to meet in order to earn the right to make His Majesty remember my name is to realize the potential set by my bloodlines and my augmentations. My mother is a court painter. When she is truly serious, she can produce masterwork paintings at a frequency of 27 percent. She has painted so many masterworks over the course of her long career that they can decorate an entire throne room! As for my humble self, look around you. The works here are the best that I can produce in my current state. Do you understand my position now? My record is so paltry that I do not have the face to return to the capital!"

Wow.

This was really harsh.

The life of a Rubarthan prince was so much worse than Ves had ever imagined. It was rather funny because a lot of people envied the members of the Rubarthan Imperial Household for enjoying the greatest luxuries from the moment of their birth.

Ves tried to figure out what he should do with this revelation. How the hell could he pull a prince with daddy issues out of his distorted mindset?

Given how Prince Casevir obsessed about his absent father all his life, it was difficult to shake him out of this incredibly unhealthy fixation!

Chapter 5610 Ves the Truth Teller

Ves did not want to end this call while leaving this issue unresolved.

It hadn't been a problem when Ves remained unaware of what was eating the Impresario Prince, but now that it came to his attention, it was his duty to do his best to find a resolution to this problem!

Ves grew frustrated by the limitations of a remote call. His options were much more limited when he wasn't in the same room as his conversation partner.

Short of employing tricks that did not translate well over a remote connection, Ves could only rely on his words to shake Prince Casevir out of his unhealthy fixation.

"You know what I think?" He said. "Your old man may be a great emperor. He has certainly done much to reverse the pattern of his predecessor and steered the New Rubarth Empire onto a better path. However, that does not mean he is best at everything. At the very least, I think he is a terrible father." The Impresario Prince looked scandalized!

Although it was not unheard of for the Star Emperor to get criticized, no one cared about the complaints of ordinary people.

It was a different story when Ves dared to criticize the current sovereign in the presence of a Rubarthan prince!

If a recording of this meeting leaked to the public, the entirety of the Rubarthan Pact would probably rise up in outrage!

Ves didn't care, however.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Ves frowned. "Have you forgotten where we are these days? We are in the Red Ocean! Our civilization has transitioned into the Age of Dawn! A new time has come. Red humanity has cut loose from all of the ancient and impregnable institutions of the Milky Way. This includes the current Star Emperor and most of the Rubarthan Imperial Household."

"Be that as it may, the Rubarthan Pact is still a colonial state of the New Rubarth Empire! Until one of us has successfully ascended to a throne of our own, we are still subjects of our great father!"

Ves snorted at that. "That is stupid. Your awful father can't do anything. There is no reason why you should continue to show any deference to him, especially when it is not deserved! I don't care how many Rubarthans respect him. As a father and the head of an expansive household, the current Star Emperor has done a terrible job at raising an actual family. If your childhood conforms to the pattern that he has set for the thousands of other children, then he really shouldn't earn any respect for his callousness. He doesn't love you and your fellow siblings at all. He only regards you as tools to extend his tentacles across Rubarthan society!"

There was no way that Prince Casevir hadn't already figured that out, but it was incredibly difficult for him to admit it out loud.

No honored and respected prince wanted to admit that his worth only extended as far as securing the Star Emperor's control over a sector!

"Why are you insulting my great father? Do you not realize how much jeopardy you are putting yourself in? The Star Emperor is the father of the Rubarthan Pact! He is the sole unifying symbol that brings us all together. He may not be perfect, but his excellence inspires us all to work harder and do our best to live up to our potential!"

Ves hated this argument. There was nothing wrong with expecting people to make good use of the opportunities presented to them, but this extreme obsession with success likely caused a huge amount of mental anguish within Rubarthan society!

"Screw your father." Ves spat. "I am being serious. The Star Emperor earns no respect from me. Family is one of the most important institutions of the human race. His excessive propensity to produce offspring is already a perversion of the natural order, but I can accept it as long as all of his children receive the love and attention that they intrinsically deserve. Yet your old man is such an abysmal parent that he can't even be bothered to hold his own babies in his arms! How much affection is left in his heart? If he cannot bring himself to love any of his children without any utilitarian purpose in mind, then he is not qualified to earn my respect, let alone yours! Let's face it, Casevir. Your dad is a heartless scumbag. ADMIT IT! You know it's the truth!"

"No! You are wrong, professor! My great father has managed to defeat all of his competing brothers and sisters to win the throne after the Disaster Star has ended his reign! The New Rubarth Empire has yet to overthrow the regime of the Big Two, but it has recovered to a much greater state under his stewardship."

Ves crossed his arms. "That may be true, but so what? How does your father's record as a ruler have any bearing on you, a son that has only received neglect? You don't even have any desire to compete for the new throne according to your words! Why are you still afraid yet also obsessed with earning the approval of an unworthy parent who is stuck in a galaxy that is 50 million light-years away? The distance between you and your scumbag dad is so astronomically great that it doesn't make any sense for you to think about him anymore!"

The prince could not accept this argument. He had spent his entire life chasing after the current Star Emperor that he was too afraid of getting rid of an important anchor that defined his identity!

That was exactly the problem with this stubborn fool.

"Your identity as a Rubarthan prince and your identity as an artist are not in complete harmony with each other." Ves observed. "One is interfering with the other. Do you know why your mother has managed to become a well-known maker of masterworks while you are only able to produce mediocre works? It is because your deadbeat of a father is personally holding you back!"

The Impresario Prince was not a sheltered man. As an artist and a patron of the arts, he had interacted with a diverse set of personalities.

Every good artist possessed a different set of eccentricities. They were the reason why geniuses managed to stand out from the crowd. They also happened to make it rather headache-inducing to follow their bizarre trains of thought.

Out of all of the eccentrics that the Impresario Prince had talked with over the course of his life, none of them were as extreme and outrageous as Professor Larkinson!

Prince Casevir started to comprehend first-hand why this infamous mech designer became known as the Devil Tongue!

The Larkinson Patriarch truly had no taboos!

Ves continued to make his heretical case. "The concerns and obligations set by your father and all of the Rubarthan institutions around him should have no bearing on your life, especially now that the Great Severing has made a clean break between your past and your present. Recent events have already cut your father out of your life. The only step you need to take is to acknowledge your new reality. You are free, Casevir! You are no longer a Rubathan prince, but a man who is free to pursue his own ambitions for his own reasons rather than the expectations of an irrelevant bastard."

"Professor Larkinson... I..."

"You know my words are true. Don't deny it, prince. Aren't Rubarthans supposed to be faithful adherents to meritocratic ideals? One of the essential components of a functioning meritocracy is to accurately identify and acknowledge faults. Do not tell me that your dad is a model of a good parent. He is the exact opposite! Since the father is such an awful human being, why should the son still look up to him? This is such a silly situation that I do not know what you have been doing all of these years!"

The prince lowered his head. He felt the urge to end this connection right away, but Ves' words sounded so compelling that he couldn't help but see this through the end.

Casevir's pathetic display signaled to Ves that he had gone far enough. It was time for him to introduce a bit of sweetness to the poor prince.

Ves started to sigh and relax his posture. "Let's get back to the original topic. I think I have managed to diagnose the fundamental reasons why you have gone nowhere as an artist. It is because you have been deprived of love throughout your life. It is clear that your father has done worse than nothing in your upbringing. What about your mother?"

"My mother has raised me to become a prince that is skilled enough in my craft to earn my father's attention." Casevir flatly responded. "I... love my mother, but I am ashamed that I have not been able to master all of her teachings. My continued setbacks and failures have caused her to lose the dignity of a consort. I am the reason why she has been unable to maintain her position in court. She has never managed to capture my father's attention again, and she has expressed her frustrations to me many times."

11 n ...

Even his mother turned out to be a piece of work.

The entire Rubarthan Imperial Household was so stupidly dysfunctional that Ves wondered how the New Rubarth Empire managed to do so well all of these years!

"Forget about your parents." Ves strongly advised. "You are over a century old. You should already be a grandpa if your lifespan is equivalent to that of a baseline human. You are well past the time where you should still care about fulfilling the expectations of your parents. If you ask me, you should start to build your own family. According to your record, you have never married, is that correct?"

The Impresario Prince nodded. "I will not father my own children if I am still a disgrace. I do not want my children to inherit my stigma."

"That is one of the stupidest mistakes that you have made." Ves retorted. "Marrying the love of your life and having children who you can cherish from birth are invaluable experiences to a deprived prince such as yourself. As I have stated before, your great failing as an artist is that you have lived your entire life without receiving the affection that you deserve. That has stunted your growth as a human as well as an artist. How can you be passionate about your work when your capacity to love is so poor? Take a look around your own atelier. Which of these sculptures or paintings are imbued with an abundance of love or passion?"

The prince could not pick one out. Though the complete and incomplete artworks in this chamber did not reflect his full body of work, he knew that his published and exhibited pieces were not much better in this regard.

"An artist cannot succeed if he does not love his own craft." Ves emphatically stated. "The reason why you are stuck for so long is because you have treated your art as a means to an end. You are treating it as a tool to fuel your ambitions as a prince. That may be enough to sustain you for a time, but there comes a point where pure utilitarianism falls short."

The Impresario Prince let out a frustrated grunt. "You have made your point, professor. What must I do to remedy this deficiency? I do think I am capable of starting my own family. I... have aged past the point where I can muster any desire to seek out a spouse."

This was certainly a thorny issue. As Ves tried to come up with suggestions, he suddenly came up with an insane and radical solution!

Even though it was incredibly stupid, Ves had already crossed a lot of lines during this crazy call. It hardly mattered anymore if he decided to break another limit!

"Goldie! Come out and show this prince what true family should like!"

"Nyaaaaaa!"

The Golden Cat manifested next to Ves!

From the moment she appeared, her warm and reassuring glow began to dominate his office.

A part of that gentle and comforting glow radiated through the remote connection and radiated across Casevir's atelier.

Even though the Impresario Prince was unable to experience Goldie's full presence, his reaction was still noticeable!

He closed his eyes and spontaneously relaxed the tension in his body. The love and warmth radiated by the spiritual cat somehow made him feel more content than anything else in his life!

"Nyaa nyaa nyaa." Goldie encouragingly sounded as she kept trying to channel her unconditional love and affection through the active communication link.

Ves gently stroked Goldie's translucent back as he observed the results.

He smiled when he saw that not even a high and mighty Rubarthan prince could resist the Golden Cat's charm!

"Do you want to know what I think that you should do? Give up on your princely title. Resign from the Imperial Rubarthan Household. Sever all of the remaining ties to your deadbeat father and start living a life that you can actually enjoy. If you want to take it a step further, then you can always join my clan. I do not dare to make a lot of promises to you, but if there is one resource we have in abundance, it is love and family! You will definitely be able to gain the affection that you need to reinvent yourself as a passionate artist!"

Crazy!

This was crazy!

Not even Ves believed he had actually extended an invitation to a real Rubarthan prince!